

The Potential Power of Geotourists- Their Interests and Attitudes

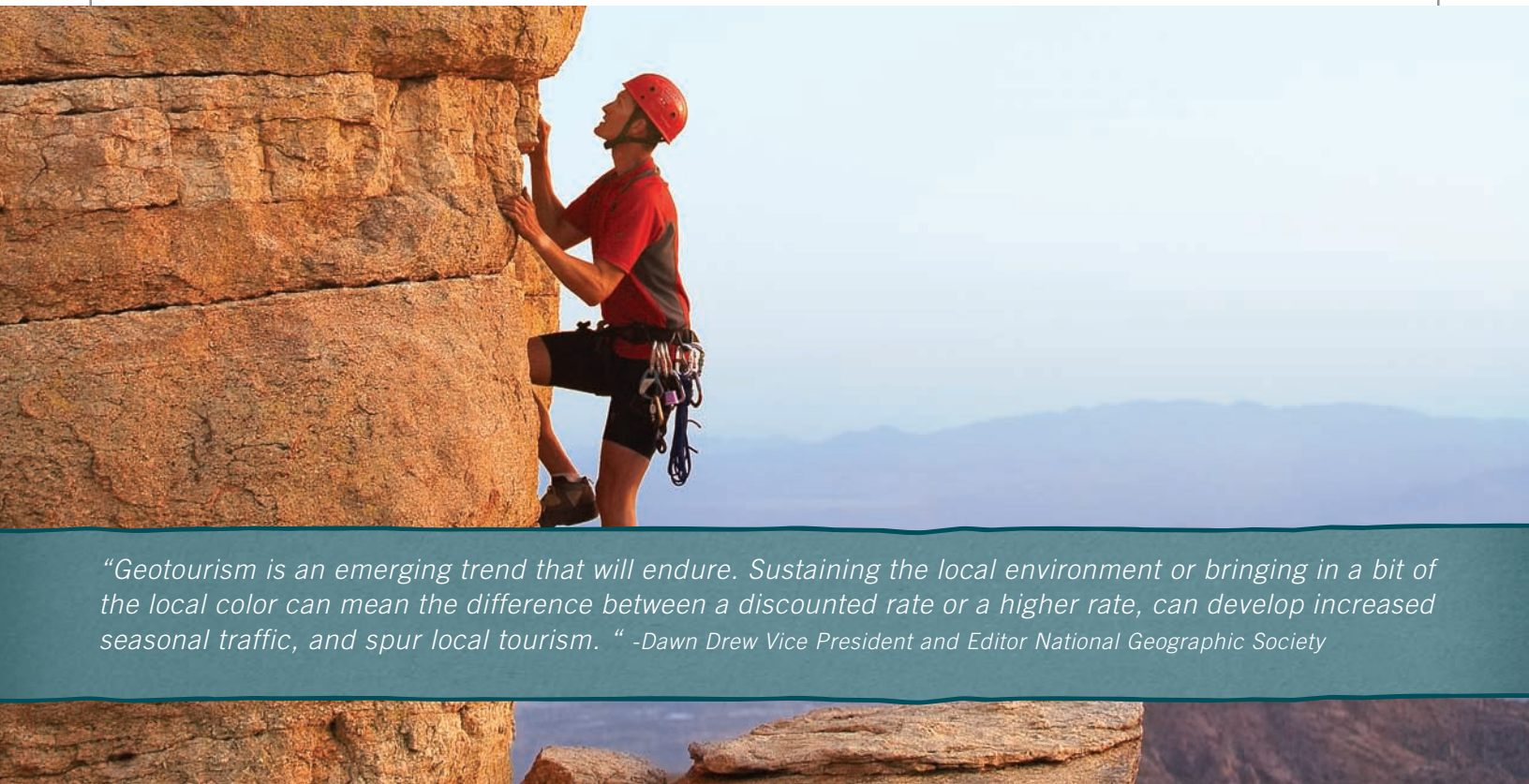
As the visitor market continues to change and evolve, so does the underlying research conducted to understand these changes. In 2003, the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) teamed with National Geographic in presenting findings from a new study called Geotourism – The New Trend in Travel. This study presented the evolution of thinking from eco-tourists and sustainable tourism to Geotourism. As TIA noted, geotourism builds upon sustainability efforts of the past, yet offers the travel industry an outward-facing, consumer-driven approach to tourism product development and destination management.

To bring increased understanding to this concept, a large, two-phase consumer study on travelers' environmental and cultural attitudes and behaviors was undertaken by NFO Research. Phase I of the study segmented American travelers into eight distinct market segments based on consumers' general attitudes about traveling; their travel preferences; their civic, environmental, and culturally-oriented practices in the local area; membership in various affinity groups; and their attitudes about tourism's impact on the local area. Phase II of the study followed up with Phase I respondents to explore consumer awareness of travel companies' various environmental and cultural practices.

The study brought out a variety of key findings related to visitor attitudes towards tourism and the environment including:

- Nearly three quarters of all travelers claim that it is important to them that their visits not damage the environment.
- Most travelers (73%) place a high importance on a clean, unpolluted environment when they take a leisure trip.
- Authenticity is important to travelers as 61% believe their experience is better when their destination preserves its natural, historic, and cultural sites.
- The majority of travelers are ready to act to preserve and protect our natural sites as 59% support controlling access to and/or more careful regulation of National Parks and public lands in order to help preserve and protect the environment.
- While 28% of respondents said they generally buy products and services from specific companies that make an effort to preserve and protect the environment, an even higher level (35%) are inclined to select travel companies that strive to protect and preserve the local environment of the destination.
- Fully 38% said they would pay more to use a travel company that strives to protect and preserve the environment. Most important, the majority (61%) of those who would pay more to use such companies would in fact pay five to ten percent more.
- While these practices are important to many, only about half of all travelers are aware of at least one practice employed by travel companies to preserve and protect the environment of destinations.

As these findings and the quote below recognizes, geotourism is an important evolving trend. However, a key question for destinations attempting to take advantage of these prospective visitors' interests and attitudes is "Do we understand who these visitors are and how we can most effectively reach and speak to them?"



"Geotourism is an emerging trend that will endure. Sustaining the local environment or bringing in a bit of the local color can mean the difference between a discounted rate or a higher rate, can develop increased seasonal traffic, and spur local tourism. " -Dawn Drew Vice President and Editor National Geographic Society

Segmenting Geotourists

The TIA Geotourism survey considered the overall adult American travel market and segmented them into one of eight traveler categories. Three of these segments, accounting for approximately 36% of travelers, can be classified as “sustainable tourists” or “Geotourists” and hold the greatest potential for targeting. They include:

Geo-Savvys - young, well-educated, and environmentally aware travelers

One in four Geo-savvys is under age 35, giving this market segment an adventurous flair. Half of Geo savvys live in large cities, and one in four lives in the Pacific region. Many Geo-savvys are affluent, although most young Geo-savvys have not yet reached the peak earning years. When it comes to travel, Geo-savvys show a distinct preference for destinations with authentic historic sites, different cultures, and educational experiences. Of all the geotourism segments, Geo-savvys are most likely to be aware of travel companies' practices to preserve the environment of destinations. Along with Urban Sophisticates, Geo-savvys have the highest proportion of travelers (50%) who would use a travel company that preserves and protects the environment, even if they had to pay more.

Urban Sophisticates - the most affluent travelers with strong preferences for the cultural and social aspects of travel

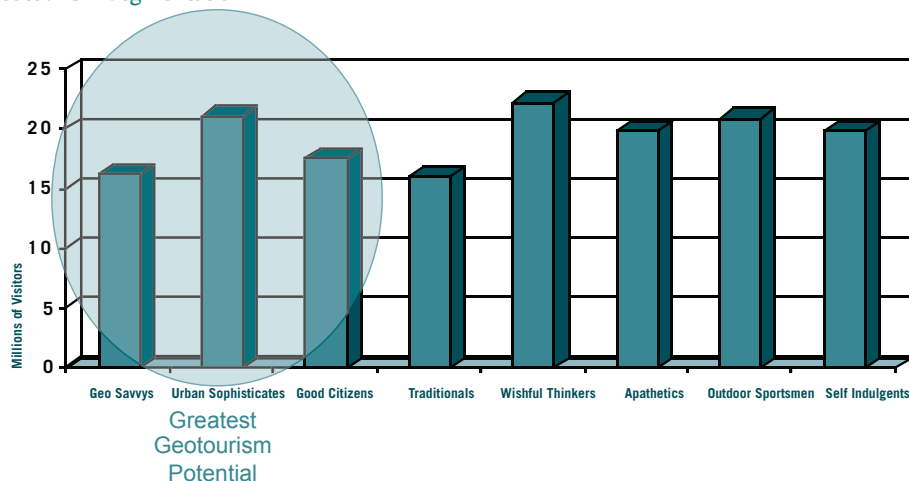
This segment's affluence is reflected in its demographic profile. These travelers are highly educated and are the most likely to hold executive, managerial, or professional occupations. Over half (56%) of Urban Sophisticates live in large urban areas and one in five lives in second-tier cities. Not surprisingly, Urban Sophisticates' affluence and cultural affinity have a strong effect on their travel preferences. The majority of Urban Sophisticates (67%) prefer high quality accommodations with excellent facilities and fine dining. They also tend to seek destinations that offer authentic historic sites (73%) and cultural/arts events or attractions (74%). Most Urban Sophisticates prefer trips where they can explore historic and charming towns and locations (86%). Extensive travel experience makes these travelers highly aware of what travel companies do to preserve the history and culture of destinations. Of all the segments, Urban Sophisticates are the most willing to pay more to use a travel company that preserves the history and culture of destinations.

Good Citizens - older and less sophisticated, but socially-conscious travelers.

Good Citizens' demographic profile reflects an older, but wiser set with an element of affluence. Along with Urban Sophisticates and Geo Savvys, Good Citizens are well educated. Four in ten Good Citizens (41%) have annual household incomes above \$75,000. What distinguishes Good Citizens is a heightened level of cultural and environmental awareness in their everyday lives. Good Citizens are more likely than any other group to make donations to historic, cultural and educational organizations. Similarly, this group is also most likely to buy from companies that donate to charities (52%) and from companies that make an effort to preserve and protect the environment (47%). When it comes to travel, Good Citizens are likely to carry this affinity with them. Many Good Citizens (70%) support controlling access to National Parks and other public lands in order to better preserve them. A majority believe that there should be more careful regulation of National Parks and public lands (67%). Many Good Citizens are willing to choose a travel firm that protects and preserves the environment and cultural heritage of destinations, even if it costs more. Yet compared to Geo-savvys and Urban Sophisticates, Good Citizens would not pay as much of a premium to use such travel companies.

Further insight into these key target segments is available from TIA and their Geotourism study.

Geotourism Segmentation



The Arizona-Sonora Desert Region Geotourism MapGuide – MapGuide Front

To capitalize on the potential of this Geotourist market, the Arizona Office of Tourism teamed with the Sonora Tourism Office, National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations, the Bureau of Land Management and the Sonoran Institute in the development of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Region MapGuide. This was the first bi-national MapGuide effort undertaken by National Geographic and positioned the states of Arizona and Sonora with a select group of destinations who had, or were, undertaking similar initiatives. These other geotourism destinations included the Appalachian region in eastern United States, Vermont's Northern Kingdom, and the countries of Honduras, Romania and Norway.

This initiative commenced in December of 2005 when Governor Napolitano of Arizona and Governor Bours of Sonora joined in the signing the National Geographic Geotourism Charter for the two states during an Arizona - Mexico Commission Plenary Session. This was followed by a year-long MapGuide development process. Early in 2006, the Sonoran Institute and the Arizona Office of Tourism held a variety of outreach sessions in which the MapGuide project was explained, geotourism principals were discussed and a nomination process was implemented. A similar mix of outreach sessions were also undertaken in Sonora. In addition to the outreach efforts, Geotourism Councils were created in both Arizona and Sonora to provide direction and oversight of the effort, with broad representation from educational, public sector, tourism, cultural and land management organizations.

While the Sonoran Desert is the main geographic element of the MapGuide, it encompasses a broader region of both Arizona and Sonora. The MapGuide stretches from Phoenix south to the border and includes most of the state of Sonora. Hundreds of prospective sites were nominated in Arizona and were considered by National Geographic for the MapGuide project. Given space limitations, 85 Arizona Geotourism sites were incorporated, along with 57 in Sonora. It is important to recognize that National Geographic's selection of sites not only considered the geotourism orientation of a site, but also their goal for dispersion of sites throughout the map and for a representative mix of types of sites.

There are two main elements on the front side of the MapGuide – individual Map Notes for most of the identified sites and a series of Text Blocks that provide deeper discussion on themes such as Desert Ecology, On the Border and Mining & Ranching.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Region Geotourism MapGuide MapGuide Front



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While the front side of the MapGuide focused on the geographic areas of southern Arizona and Sonora, the back side of the MapGuide expands on unique Geotourism themes. Additional insight on topics like Water, The First Peoples, Arts, and Food and Produce are presented. Each of these themes are reinforced with photography that captures the essence of these themes.

Three additional regional discussions are positioned on the right side of the MapGuide, each incorporating a destination in Arizona and Sonora. The regions between Phoenix and Rocky Point discuss the Bountiful Beauty of the Heart of the Desert, bringing out destinations like the Sonoran Desert National Monument, Organ Pipe National Monument and the Pinacate Biosphere in Sonora. The Passionate Peoples and their Spiritual Heritage are brought out in areas between Tucson and Caborca, reinforcing the many missions in this region and the role of prominent missionary Father Kino. The Soul of Sonora - Cultural Wellspring highlights the areas from Bisbee to Hermosillo and expands on the role of horses and ranches in this region's history.

Throughout the MapGuide, Tom Miller, the Tucson based writer who authored the Text Blocks and themed regional discussions, incorporates quotes from actual residents of the area, bringing an additional layer of authenticity to the MapGuide.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Region Geotourism MapGuide has been developed in both English and Spanish versions. Both states are distributing a limited number of hard copy maps, however, both states will engage visitors with an electronic version of the MapGuide and provide a more diverse range of Geotourism elements within the website. By utilizing the web in this manner, geotourism sites beyond those actually on the hard copy map can be presented and a variety of engaging associated components can be developed.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Region Geotourism MapGuide MapGuide Back

